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MOVIES & SHOWTIMES

## Five of the best directorial debuts

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE • The Bulletin

**N**ot many directors have stellar debuts, but some hit the big screen sweet spot the first time and cement themselves among the list of other fine directors. Here are just a few that started out strong and continued to thrive.

**Mel Brooks, "The Producers" (1967)** — Brooks may go down in history as one of the funniest people that ever graced our mortal coil, and in his directorial debut, his humor and creativity shone brightly. Coming off his work as a writer and occasional actor for several Sid Caesar projects as well as "Your Show of Shows," Brooks took the helm (and the pen for which he won the Oscar) for his first feature about two Broadway producers (Zero Mostel and Gene Wilder) who believe they can make more money with a flop than with a hit. So they find the worst play, worst director and worst actor to make their riches. But when "Springtime for Hitler" premieres, things don't go totally to plan. Listen carefully for Brooks' voice as one of the actors in the title musical number. Stream it on HBO Max or rent it from Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

**Jordan Peele, "Get Out" (2017)** — Peele made a name for himself as one half of the sketch comedy duo Key and Peele. But since his brilliantly crafted script won him an Oscar (which is rare for a genre film), "Get Out" solidified him among the great filmmakers of his generation as he continues to make and produce films and television shows of merit. The film follows a young Black man as he visits his white girlfriend's parents for the first time and slowly comes to realize that it's all just a facade for something far more devious at work. Stream it on Hulu (with Live TV) or rent it from Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

**John Singleton, "Boyz n the Hood" (1991)** — Singleton had the idea of the film that would be his debut when he was applying for film school. He submitted the idea in his application in 1986 then sat on the story until Paramount greenlit the project with him as director. With rich, fully dimensional characters and an emotionally packed story based on people Singleton knew, he would go on to be nominated for



Turner Entertainment/RKO

Orson Welles in a scene from "Citizen Kane" (1941).



Columbia Pictures

Cuba Gooding Jr., left, and Morris Chestnut in a scene from "Boyz n the Hood" (1991).

Best Original Screenplay and Best Director for the film, making him the first African American filmmaker and the youngest to be nominated for the latter. The film follows a

group of friends from their youth to young adulthood in South Central Los Angeles surrounded by the neighborhood's gang culture. Rent it on Amazon Prime, Google Play,

iTunes, Vudu and YouTube.

**Orson Welles, "Citizen Kane" (1941)** — There is a reason why this ends up on movie lists constantly, but it is also easy to not get the hype at first. Welles was given carte blanche to make whatever he wanted for RKO and with total control over the script, casting, editing, directing, every detail he wanted without the studio butting into his process, it was, and still is, very unusual for a first time director. The semi-biographical film not so subtly influenced by the life of newspaper magnate and millionaire William Randolph Hearst follows the fictional character, Charles Foster Kane (Welles) in his rags to riches anti-heroic story. From the innovative cinematography to the brilliant script (officially co-written by Herman J. Mankiewicz, but it is still up for debate the ratio of what each of them actually contributed to the finished script), "Citizen Kane" stands out as one of the best debuts and still very relevant today. Stream it on HBO Max or rent it on Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

**Olivia Wilde, "Booksmart" (2019)** — Wilde's debut may have been incredibly recent, but what a debut it was for the actor-turned-director. It follows two assertive best friends, Molly and Amy (Beanie Feldstein and Kaitlyn Dever) who have devoted their high school lives to study, extracurriculars (Molly is class president), activism and everything that looks good on a college application. It paid off, they both got into their dream schools, Yale and Columbia but on the last day of high school, they find out that everyone else, who partied and had fun, also got dream schools. So with one night left before graduation, they decide to party, for better or worse. It is heartfelt and is emotionally authentic even if some of the situations border on outrageous. Stream it on Hulu or rent it on Amazon Prime, Google Play, iTunes, Vudu or YouTube.

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